**A Plea for Religious Liberty**

**by Roger Williams, 1644**

[Roger Williams (*ca*. 1603-83), religious leader and one of the founders of Rhode Island, was the son of a well-to-do London businessman. Educated at Cambridge (A.B., 1627) he became a clergyman and in 1630 sailed for Massachusetts. He refused a call to the church of Boston because it had not formally broken with the Church of England, but after two invitations he became the assistant pastor, later pastor, of the church at Salem. He questioned the right of the colonists to take the Indians' land from them merely on the legal basis of the royal charter and in other ways ran afoul of the oligarchy then ruling Massachusetts. In 1635 he was found guilty of spreading "new authority of magistrates" and was ordered to be banished from the colony. He lived briefly with friendly Indians and then, in 1636, founded Providence in what was to be the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. His religious views led him to become briefly a Baptist, later a Seeker. In 1644, while he was in England getting a charter for his colony from Parliament, he wrote the work from which this dialogue is taken. During much of his later life he was engaged in polemics on political and religious questions. He was an important figure in the intellectual life of his time, though the direct influence of his writings is considered by Professor Brockunier to have been slight: "Earliest of the fathers of American democracy, he owes his enduring fame to his humanity and breadth of view, his untiring devotion to the cause of democracy and free opportunity, and his long record of opposition to the privileged and self-seeking"]

First, that the blood of so many hundred thousand souls of Protestants and Papists, spilt in the wars of present and former ages, for their respective consciences, is not required nor accepted by Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace.

Secondly, pregnant scriptures and arguments are throughout the work proposed against the doctrine of persecution for cause of conscience.

Thirdly, satisfactory answers are given to scriptures, and objections produced by Mr. Calvin, Beza, Mr. Cotton, and the ministers of the New English churches and others former and later, tending to prove the doctrine of persecution for cause of conscience.

Fourthly, the doctrine of persecution for cause of conscience is proved guilty of all the blood of the souls crying for vengeance under the altar.

Fifthly, all civil states with their officers of justice in their respective constitutions and administrations are proved essentially civil, and therefore not judges, governors, or defenders of the spiritual or Christian state and worship.

Sixthly, it is the will and command of God that (since the coming of his Son the Lord Jesus) a permission of the most paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or antichristian consciences and worships, be granted to all men in all nations and countries; and they are only to be fought against with that sword which is only (in soul matters) able to conquer, to wit, the sword of God's Spirit, the Word of God.

Seventhly, the state of the Land of Israel, the kings and people thereof in peace and war, is proved figurative and ceremonial, and no pattern nor precedent for any kingdom or civil state in the world to follow.

Eighthly, God requireth not a uniformity of religion to be enacted and enforced in any civil state; which enforced uniformity (sooner or later) is the greatest occasion of civil war, ravishing of conscience, persecution of Christ Jesus in his servants, and of the hypocrisy and destruction of millions of souls.

Ninthly, in holding an enforced uniformity of religion in a civil state, we must necessarily disclaim our desires and hopes of the Jew's conversion to Christ.

Tenthly, an enforced uniformity of religion throughout a nation or civil state, confounds the civil and religious, denies the principles of Christianity and civility, and that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.

Eleventhly, the permission of other consciences and worships than a state professeth only can (according to God) procure a firm and lasting peace (good assurance being taken according to the wisdom of the civil state for uniformity of civil obedience from all forts).

Twelfthly, lastly, true civility and Christianity may both flourish in a state or kingdom, notwithstanding the permission of divers and contrary consciences, either of Jew or Gentile....